

# STARRY FLAG WEEKLY

THRILLING STORIES OF OUR VICTORIOUS ARMY

## COMEZ' YANKEE SCOUT OR THE BLOW THAT TOLD FOR CUBA



BY DOUGLAS WELLS

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# Starry Flag Weekly

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## Gomez's Yankee Scout

OR,

### THE BLOW THAT TOLD FOR CUBA.

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE "TWO SCOUTS."

"You hear nothing?"

"Not a sound, my sergeant."

"It is hardly likely that the enemy would be moving at this hour."

"The Spanish troops will make an early start. That was the report brought in, my sergeant."

In the dead darkness of night two youths crouched at the edge of a road in the Matanzas province of Cuba.

They were soldiers; their arms showed that.

That they were scouts their methods suggested.

That they would move, when they did move, with the utmost secrecy and stealth could easily have been conjectured by the padded feet of their horses.

Those animals, scraggy, rugged little Cuban ponies, stood sleepily by, haltered to trees.

For three hours the ponies had stood thus, having finished in the first ten

minutes all the grass within reach of their teeth.

For the same length of time their riders had been on the spot, not having moved a dozen feet away from their horses at any time.

During all that while both youths had been alert. Members of the Cuban army, they had been sent out to detect and give timely notice of the expected approach of a battalion of Spanish infantry.

On the afternoon before spies had brought word to Colonel Ragado, commanding the Cuban forces in that immediate neighborhood, that a strong battalion of Spanish infantry would start, some time during the night, to convoy a wagon train of provisions from the fortified town of Cantaleva to the Spanish forts further in the interior at La Puncha.

La Puncha was garrisoned by some four hundred Spanish troops. It was a strong, strategic position, well defended by cannon, and, though attacked by the Cubans three time during the last few months, it had managed to hold out.

General Betancourt, commanding the Cuban insurgent forces in the Matanzas

A NAVAL CADET UNDER FIRE—SEE TRUE BLUE.



province, had finally decided that to capture the forts at La Puncheda would cost more Cuban lives than the forts would be worth.

Nevertheless, it was exasperating to have a Spanish stronghold in the centre of a district through which the Cuban army maneuvered.

As a final resort, Betancourt had resolved upon starving out the garrison.

Henceforth, all attempts to get supplies from Havana to La Puncheda had been frustrated by the Cuban soldiers.

Instead of going to La Puncheda, the supplies invariably went into Cuban camps.

As a result, the men at La Puncheda were on very short rations.

In less than another week they would be suffering the pangs of starvation, unless food were got through to them.

This food was now on its way through. Until night, the wagon train had halted at Cantaleva, some fifteen miles away.

From Cantaleva to La Puncheda was twenty miles; the spot at which our two young scouts had stationed themselves was barely six miles away from La Puncheda.

Colonel Ragado had under his command some hundred and twenty Cuban infantry, and, in addition, eighty cavalrymen under Major Alvaredo.

On the other hand, the battalion conveying the food train was reported to be six hundred strong.

Desperate chances these were for the Cubans—to attack three times their number, but it was just the kind of battle that the Cubans had delighted to wage through three years of hard, heroic fighting.

Now to return to the two scouts.

The slightly taller one, who wore a sergeant's chevrons, was an American, Hal Maynard.

He had been a clerk to an American planter. Unable to get away from Havana on the ninth of April, the last day of General Lee's famous American exodus, Hal had been left behind, had fallen into the hands of the Spaniards, and had been especially persecuted by a Spanish merchant, Senor Vasquez.

Escaping all the snares of this murderous Spaniard, through the assistance of a young Cuban, Juan Ramirez, Hal had accompanied his new-found comrade out into the "long grass," where they had volunteered with the Cuban troops.

Acts of valor, fully described in a preceding narrative, had won for Hal Maynard hearty recognition in the shape of a sergeant's rank. Ramirez, who was no less heroic, had been made a corporal.

The two were now inseparable, even in battle.

Hence they were together now on this scouting work.

"Senor Hal," suggested Juan, impatiently, "shall we not go further down the road? The Spaniards are slow in coming. If we ride nearer to Cantaleva, we shall know the sooner of their coming."

"I see only one objection," replied Hal.

"And that?"

"Our orders."

"We were told to go out a mile or so on the road."

"And we are fully a mile now away from the major."

"But we were not told to keep exactly to the mile."

"I think, Juan, our orders were sufficiently plain. My hot-blooded friend, you must learn to control your impatience."

"It is hard," sighed Ramirez. "I would fight all the time, yet I am told to



sit on nothing, with my hands ever in my pockets!"

Hal's low laugh broke in on his comrade's plaint.

"Try to keep cool, Juan. For my part, I believe that when to-day's fight opens we shall have plenty of outlet for our excitement."

"And meantime," grunted the Cuban disconsolately, "we must remain here like two puppies tied to a post!"

"Oh, come, now!" protested Hal. "It would be both more gracious and more truthful to liken us to two watchdogs that are determined not to wander from their trust."

"You are always cool, and always right," sighed Ramirez, half enviously.

Hal smiled, but said nothing, while Ramirez, able to keep still in only one way, lay down upon the ground with one ear pressed close against the earth.

"Do you hear anything now?" asked Hal.

"Mi amigo (my friend), rest assured that when I do I shall not lose a second in telling you."

Hal nodded smilingly, and sat with his back against a tree trunk watching his comrade.

Between fatigue, broken rest and the soothing night air, Hal soon closed his eyes without meaning to.

Ramirez had no thought of sleep. To his fiery nature, under the circumstances, sleep would have been an impossibility.

No sound broke the night's stillness. Even the ponies, as if accustomed to the stealthy ways of their riders, uttered no whinnies.

An hour went by, the darkness melting slowly into the first light of dawn.

Hal speaking no word, Ramirez remained silent, listening with his ear ever to the ground.

At length the Cuban caught the sound

for which he listened—or thought he did.

Without raising his head, he whispered: "Senor Hal!"

No answer.

"Senor Hal," whispered Juan once more, and a trifle louder.

"Pouf!" came the sleeper's light breath.

Ramirez rose and turned swiftly.

"Senor Hal!" he repeated, and gave the young sergeant's foot a gentle shove.

"Eh?" grunted Hal, awaking with a start.

"The enemy——"

"Coming?"

"I think so."

Upon his feet with a rush, Hal clasped the trunk of the tree in his arms.

Up he went, and up, until he reached the branches. Now his progress was more swift. Close behind him came the Cuban.

It was almost broad daylight now. There was full light enough to see anything within the range of vision.

"There!" indicated Hal, pointing between the branches.

Somewhat obstructed though their view was, they were able to make out the figures of advancing men.

"Mere pacificos," grunted Juan, in disgust.

"Very well armed, for pacificos," muttered Hal, whose eyes were keener.

"True; they have guns," admitted Ramirez, after a close scrutiny. "But where is the wagon train we heard of? Have we waited all night to see only this handful of vagabonds of Spanish soldiers?"

"It must be an advance guard—a scouting party," mused Hal. "Those fellows are a half a mile away, do you not say so? We can safely wait here, since the road winds, until they have covered half of the distance."

"If there are no more than those twen-

**Are You a Patriotic Boy? Read True Blue.**



ty," snapped Juan, his eyes gleaming, "we can wait and give them battle here among the trees."

"Your mind is always running on fight—a fight in which you wouldn't have a ghost of a chance," smiled Maynard, but there was a grimness in his smile which showed his words were by no means meant for ridicule.

"Well, could we not fight them, *mi amigo*?" demanded Ramirez, argumentatively.

"Wait," was all the answer Hal made.

In the tropics the sun rises quickly. It was up by the time that the score of advancing Spanish soldiers were within a quarter of a mile.

"There!" cried Hal, suddenly, "what do you say to that?"

As Juan pushed aside a sprig of leaves that hindered his view, he uttered a cry of delight.

Away back at the spot where they had first seen the Spanish handful the sun now glinted on the rifles of a large body of men.

"That's the battalion," uttered Hal. "Yes, I see the wagons."

"True; the food train and its convoy."

"Jupiter! but that advance guard must be made up of brave fellows. They are marching, a mere handful, into certain death in the enemy's country, in order that the death-shots sent against them may warn the convoy and put it upon its guard."

"That food train shall soon be ours."

"Don't boast, old man."

"Who boasts? Do I not fight better than I brag?" demanded Juan, looking offended.

"You surely do, old fellow. But let us use our eyes to see how many men there are with the convoy."

It required some time to do this, for a

battalion of men in marching order make a long line.

Meanwhile, the Spanish advance guard was slowly but surely approaching them along the winding road.

"Fully six hundred soldiers and twelve wagons. Is it not so?" breathed Hal.

"You are right, *mi amigo*."

"Now let us hustle out of this on the double-quick," proposed Hal. "It wouldn't do to have the advance guard catch us here."

As he spoke, Maynard dropped from the lowest limb to the ground.

But Juan, who disagreed with his comrade's last remark, hesitated, perched on the same limb.

"You do not want the advance guard to catch us?" he quivered. "Now, *mi amigo*, I am not so certain that it would not be highly desirable."

Now, when Juan Ramirez got such an idea in his head, he was likely to prove stubborn.

## CHAPTER II.

### A CUBAN AMBUSH.

"Come down," called Hal.

"I am not so sure, *mi amigo*."

"Do you want the advance guard to catch up with us?"

"I assure that it would suit me to perfection."

"And spoil Colonel Ragado's chance of ambuscading the foe?"

"If he hears our shots," meditated Juan, wickedly, "he will charge forward."

"And cost the lives of more Cubans than are otherwise needed to accomplish to-day's work."

But still Ramirez hesitated. He could never be made to see the necessity of running from Spaniards.

"Come down," ordered Hal. "I command it."



"Oh, very well, my sergeant."

And Ramirez dropped promptly to the ground.

"Mount," directed Hal. "Ride fast. We have already lost too much time."

They were in saddle and off up the road in a twinkling, their galloping ponies seeming to realize how much depended upon their speed.

Yet hardly a sound did those wrapped and padded hoofs make on the road.

Men out of sight a hundred yards away would hardly have been aware of the passage of the scouts.

After increasing their lead over the advance guard, Maynard gave an order which sent both ponies ahead at a dead run.

Traveling at this gait, it was not long before the scouts had covered a mile.

Rounding a turn in the road, they found themselves suddenly confronted by two horsemen.

Cuban soldiers, also, were this last pair, being no others than Colonel Ragado and his cavalry officer, Major Alvaredo.

"We sighted the convoy, sir," reported Hal, saluting to both officers, but directing his remarks to Ragado.

Then our hero plunged into a quick recital of what he had learned.

Ragado and Alvaredo conversed a moment in low tone.

Then, turning to our hero:

"Follow me," directed Major Alvaredo.

He led them into the woods that bordered the road.

Here were scores of Cuban infantrymen, crouching low in the bushes for concealment, though their eyes glowed like coals with the fire of coming battle.

But Major Alvaredo did not stop to look at these men, who were under the command of his superior officer.

It was soon made necessary, by the thickness of the forest, for the three

cavalrymen to dismount, but they proceeded swiftly on foot, leading their animals at a trot.

Some two hundred feet into the forest was an open space for which the trio were headed.

Here were gathered some four score of riders. When they caught sight of their chief, each man's hand moved rapidly up in salute.

Without a word, Major Alvaredo placed himself at the head of his men, leaving Hal and Juan to find their places in the ranks.

At a signal, eighty horses moved forward, almost without noise, since the feet of every animal were padded.

By a path barely defined, Alvaredo led the way without coming once in sight of the road.

Only once did our hero catch sight of the road, and then only for an instant through the leaves.

Yet in that instant he caught sight of the Spanish advance guard, wearily pursuing its way, for a night march of fifteen miles is fatiguing.

These score of men, however, were in no danger. They passed along the road, unmolested, and without discovering the presence of a single Cuban.

Creak! squeak! Alvaredo led his softshod squadron through the forest until the creaking of the food train's wheels betrayed its presence.

Still the major did not leave his course. It was not yet time for him to act.

"The Spaniards are almost in the ambushade," breathed Ramirez in our hero's ear, but Hal held up his hand, for talking in the ranks was not now to be tolerated.

For five minutes they heard the column tramping by. It was a trying time for these Cubans, who ached to rush regardlessly into the fight, but Alvaredo's discipline was admirable.

"REMEMBER THE MAINE!" READ TRUE BLUE, THE NEW NAVAL WEEKLY.



So the two columns continued going in opposite directions—the Spanish infantry to the eastward, the Cuban cavalry to the westward.

Crash! A quick, crackling volley rang out, followed by a louder bang.

The Spanish convoy had walked into the ambushade.

Now a startling change came over Alverado's men, up to this moment so many moving sphinxes.

Alverado's machete flew upward, flashing back a signal.

All along the line that signal was repeated.

Men vaulted into their saddles, at the same time swinging their machetes as if warming up those blades for the furious work to come.

Up by the ambushade furious volleys were being fired by Cuban and Spaniard.

Over all came a babel of voices, Spanish shout and Cuban battle yell adding to the din of carnage.

"Viva Cuba Libre!" roared Alverado, in his deep, powerful voice, bringing from eighty lusty throats the tumultuous echo:

"Cuba libre! Cuba libre!"

There was no order given to charge. It was not needed. Alverado set spurs to his horse and plunged for the road, followed by the close ranks of his command.

On the flank of the front rode Hal Maynard. Just behind him came Juan Ramirez.

Into the road they struck and wheeled. Just ahead of them was the rear of the Spanish column.

Yell answered yell as foes faced each other.

There was a line of flashes, a roaring crash, and several Cuban saddles were empty.

Rising in his stirrups, facing about, Alverado shouted:

"Al machete!"

"Al machete!" came the grim response from his adoring followers.

Wherever that cry was heard in Cuba it meant that Spaniards were to be put to the sword.

It meant battle without quarter, in which the Cubans, closing at arm's length with the Spaniards, slew the latter as fast as they could wield their keen-whetted machetes.

Squarely in the faces of the charging horsemen came a second volley.

So close was the range that a dozen Cubans perished.

Hal Maynard felt the whizz of bullets all around him. Though he did not know it, his clothes were pierced in a dozen places.

Now the lines were closing. In a few seconds more Cuban and Spaniard would be mixed up in an indiscriminate melee.

But a sharp order rang out that made Spaniards fly about as if controlled by springs.

Reaching their places, down upon their knees they flopped, in the form of the famous Spanish hollow square.

On all four sides appeared a line of glistening bayonets, held breast high against the oncoming horses.

Snorting, the horses held back as their riders urged them forward.

It was a useless effort. Horses could not be driven against such a line of steel.

Ahead, Colonel Ragado's infantry were holding their own against overwhelming odds of Spaniards, but here at the rear the cavalry was held at bay by the hollow square.

"Give the brutes the spur!" gritted Hal, himself setting the example.

His horse, thus goaded, went quivering forward, only to spring back, however, when almost upon the keen points of the bayonets.

**HAVE YOU READ TRUE BLUE?**



Other riders made the same effort, but in vain. The hollow square was invulnerable to a charge.

Several of the foremost Cubans unslung their carbines, or reached for their revolvers.

"No firing," spoke up Hal, "until the order is given."

Other officers repeated the order. Ammunition was too scarce to use it when not needed.

"About face, charge!" roared Major Alvaredo.

In an instant the Cuban horsemen were in full retreat.

Yelling themselves hoarse, the Spanish soldiers rose to pour a volley after the supposed fugitives.

A mistake it proved to be, for once more wheeling the cavalry rode back to the attack.

Crack! crack! crack! The volley came, but, taken by surprise, the Spanish aim was poor, while the Cubans, riding at full length upon their horses' backs, escaped almost unscathed.

Down they thundered upon the infantry, their horses' hoofs making a noise that deadened the sounds of command.

Straight forward they rode, at full momentum, apparently destined, this time, to sweep the foe before them.

Yet equally swift the Spanish proved to be.

Like lightning their hollow square was reformed, bringing the abatis of bayonets to the fore just as the rushing horses reached them.

In vain the Cubans, swinging their machetes, strove to urge their horses against that wall of steel.

Falling back upon their haunches, the animals flatly balked.

All except Hal Maynard's mount. That brute, made frantic by the sight of

steel, lowered its head, at the same instant tossing its hind heels in the air.

It was a "buck" of the classic broncho kind—a buck totally unlooked for by our hero.

Hal rose involuntarily out of his saddle, described an upward curve as if shot from a bow, and lunged over the fringe of bayonets.

Up over the heads of the hollow square he flew, then plunged head first to the earth.

He—alone—was inside the Spanish lines!

### CHAPTER III.

#### "SAVE WHO CAN."

"This settles me!"

Hal grated the remark aloud as he found himself in mid-air.

He struck the ground heavily.

"There's some fight left in me," he muttered, as he sprang to his feet.

He was surprised that he had not already been shot.

This most certainly would have been his fate had not the Spanish soldiers been taken by surprise as he was himself.

For a moment each soldier thought it some one else's business to settle with the American.

They were being attacked from in front. All depended on keeping their hollow square formation unbroken.

To that fact our hero owed his second moment of continued life.

"Here's a big chance," gasped the boy.

His machete, being fastened to his wrist by a thong, had not got beyond his grasp.

Taking swift but firm hold of the hilt, he swung it over his head.

Swish: Down it came, with cleaving force.

Squarely across a soldier's head it

"A Naval Cadet's Torpedo Boat Command." See True Blue



landed, just as that unfortunate wretch wheeled about.

Like a clod the man with the split head fell to the ground.

But the fellow's comrade had turned.

Instantly he tried to level his rifle at Hal Maynard.

But the boy's machete rose, slashing the second soldier across the abdomen.

Crash! Down came the blade, almost severing a third soldier's head from his shoulders.

Swish! Seemingly part of the same motion the machete whizzed upward, and a fourth soldier was out of the fight.

It was all accomplished in two or three seconds, so swiftly can the terrible weapon be wielded.

"Bueno muchahco!" (good boy!) roared the delighted Alverado.

Calling to his men to follow him, the major rode through the gap made by the loss of four men from the line.

Wheeling as he rode through, Alverado worked havoc with his machete, sending three foes quickly to the ground.

The square was broken—utterly demolished. It would have been worse than folly for the Spaniards to attempt longer to keep their formation.

Cubans had ridden into the centre—were hacking right and left.

"Save who can!" shouted one soldier. It became the battle cry of rout.

Now Alvaredoa's horsemen, making their machetes ply about them like avenging lightning, repaid with interest the deaths of their own comrades at the beginning of the fight.

Those of Spain's soldiers who could fell back upon the main body of the battalion.

But here the work of death was busy, too, for Ragado's men, mostly concealed in the brush, were doing splendid work for Cuba.

Massing about the food train, Spain's soldiers prepared for a last desperate stand.

Alverado's cavalry, dividing into small squads, harassed them on all sides. One of these squads, of a dozen men, was led by Hal Maynard.

Everywhere was hand-to-hand fighting. Shots rang out, but no longer in volleys. Most of the combatants relied upon steel, fighting with desperation on both sides.

"Cut your way straight through them, boys!" shouted Hal, leading the way, and plying fearful strokes on either side with his machete.

Here was where the Spaniards played their trump card.

In one of the wagons was a Maxim gun. Remembering it, one of the officers suddenly sprang up on the wagon, jerked the machine gun to the ground, and fired the first shot.

This formidable weapon was as devastating as a pair of Gatlings.

Its succession of reports came faster than they could be counted. Its hail of bullets tore through the Cuban ranks, striking men and horses alike.

Such a weapon, if used to the best advantage, is capable of decimating a regiment in a minute or two.

"They'll win the day, if they're allowed to keep using that thing," flashed Hal.

His dozen brave Cubans were behind him.

Turning, Maynard waved his machete, pointing to the gun that was spitting out bullets faster than human mind could count.

"Muchachos," roared Hal, "we want that!"

A yell, ready as it was desperate, greeted his demand.

Wheeling their horses close together, wielding their glistening blades like

**A NAVAL CADET UNDER FIRE—SEE TRUE BLUE.**



some huge human reaper, they rushed to the attack.

"Do or die!" cheered Hal.

First on one side of his horse and then on the other flew his matchete.

Backed by his few comrades, with Juan Ramirez by his side, Hal marked a swath of death through the opposing Spaniards.

Had they possessed the presence of mind to fire they might have annihilated this desperate handful at arm's length, but Spain's soldiers, becoming rattled, resorted to steel.

This was where the Cubans, armed with their fearful machetes, and mounted into the bargain, had the advantage.

"At 'em—a last rush! The gun's ours!" quivered Hal.

For the moment he was transformed to a fury.

Certain it was that the Spaniards feared him, for they fell back as though seeking escape from a cyclone.

One, two, three, four men now stood between our hero and the death-dealing Maxim.

Down they went, one after the other.

Uttering a frantic cheer, Maynard sprang from his horse, reaching, in that same leap, the breech of the gun.

Around he swung it, training it upon the massed Spaniards just ahead.

At the same time, Ramirez and his other comrades ranged themselves on either side of the piece, resolved to die rather than permit its recapture.

"Al machete!" rose the cry, once more.

Hardly had the Maxim gun fired its last cartridge, when Ragado led his men out of the woods, falling like furies upon the demoralized survivors of the battalion.

"They run!" screamed Juan Ramirez, in ecstasy.

It was rout indeed.

"Save who can!" once more shouted Spain's harrassed soldiers.

Hal sprang to his saddle, but sat there motionless. Past him surged Alvaredo's horsemen, pursuing the Spanish survivors along the road to Cantaleva.

After the cavalry came Ragado's foot-soldiers, eager to join in the pursuit.

Back through the throng rode Ramirez, seeking some one.

As soon as his eyes rested on Hal, sitting motionless in saddle, the Cuban cried:

"How is it, mi amigo, that you do not join in the chase? I missed you and came back to see if you had been killed. I thank Heaven that you are not."

"I feel as if I had earned a rest," panted Hal. "Besides, I've no notion to pursue and cut down men who are running for life."

"Yet all who throw down their weapons and submit are spared," declared Juan, opening his eyes very wide.

"True; but how many surrender?"

"Few, I admit," laughed the Cuban, grimly. "We Cubans and Spaniards hate each other with so cordial a hate that we cannot even surrender to save our lives. But ride after our fellows, mi amigo."

"None for me, thank you," Hal responded.

Juan hesitated, for an instant, then rejoined coolly:

"If you go not, neither do I."

"Here are twelve fine wagon loads of food," commented Hal, pointing his machete to the abandoned wagon train. "Surely, at least two should guard it."

"You are right, mi amigo. Besides, we have forgotten something. The advance guard, which got through. Hearing the firing, they may return. If so, we shall be well occupied, fighting twenty men."



Juan spoke so seriously and yet modestly, that Hal could not help laughing.

So insatiable for fighting was this Cuban that he never appeared to consider any odds too great.

Yet they had not long to wait before both Ragado and Alvaredo returned, for the food train was far too precious a prize to be risked.

Then began the work of sorting the wounded from the dead. This accomplished, and the former provided with couches in the wagons, a start was made.

"Sergeant," cried Ragado, riding up, "when we go into camp to-night I shall have many to praise for bravery. But this much I will say now: For your splendid fighting, you shall be rewarded with the command of the advance guard. Major Alvaredo will allow you twelve troopers. Hasten forward, and use all vigilance."

A strange reward? For in warfare where ambuscades prevail it is often the fate of the advance guard to be wiped entirely out.

But such are the prizes drawn in the game of war.

Blushing like a school-girl, Hal stammered:

"Colonel, you overrate what I did."

"Ride forward, sir," came the crisp answer. "I am pleased with you."

Off at right angles with the road to La Puncheda moved the victorious column, never halting until ten miles had been covered.

Here, through the heat of noon-day, the victors halted.

Hal, not being on guard duty, now threw himself under the trees, reveling in the coolness of the grass.

Two horsemen dashed into camp. They were couriers, evidently, for soon after their arrival came some twenty more.

They were headed by a middle-aged

man of so distinguished appearance that our hero turned to Ramirez.

"I do not know who he is," answered Juan.

"It is General Betancourt," murmured a soldier near them.

General Betancourt, one of Gomez's most distinguished officers, commanded the insurgents in Matanzas province.

Both Ragado and Alvaredo hurried to meet the distinguished visitor.

The trio withdrew, conversing earnestly in whispers for a few minutes.

Then they called an orderly, spoke to him, and that worthy came running to where Hal lay.

"General Betancourt sends for you," stated the orderly.

"I?" repeated Hal.

"And Corporal Ramirez, also."

"I?" echoed Juan.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### ON A MISSION FOR GOMEZ.

In a twinkling, Maynard was on his feet.

Quickly as could be he brushed some of the dirt out of his clothing.

Ramirez did the same. Then, trying to look unconscious, they marched side by side to where the three officers stood conversing.

Betancourt turned with a smile that warmed Hal's heart.

"So! An American volunteer?" he cried.

"Yes, general."

"And a brave one, too."

"As to that, I cannot say, general."

"You have no need to. Your colonel and your major have said enough to make me admire you."

Then, as if fearing that Juan would feel out in the cold, Betancourt turned swiftly, laid his hand upon the Cuban boy's shoulder, and said kindly:

"Remember the Maine!" Read True Blue, the New Naval Weekly.



"A worthy comrade for Sergeant Maynard."

"That is great praise, general," glowed loyal Juan.

"You are a great admirer of Sergeant Maynard?"

"My general," replied Juan, saluting, "there may be many in the army as brave, but none, in my belief, who are cooler."

"It is true," spoke up Major Alvaredo, gravely.

"I am glad to hear it," responded the general. "Sergeant, and you, too, corporal, your officers have praised both of you. That was why I sent for you. I have work for two young, brave, cool, active men to do. They must be also young men of impeachable loyalty. Are you ready to take upon yourselves the most dangerous mission to which I can assign you?"

"Yes, general."

"Yes, my general."

From each the answer came without an instant's hesitation.

"I warn you that you must go among the enemy."

"We have been there before, general," replied Hal.

"But on this mission you will have very little chance to fight, even should you find yourselves in danger. Besides, the risk of yourselves is not the greatest risk you run. It is the risk of failure that troubles me."

As he spoke, General Betancourt studied narrowly the faces of both young men.

"As to success, general," replied Hal, promptly, "we can guarantee nothing. Only Heaven could do that."

"You have spoken wisely," replied Betancourt, smiling again. "I am inclined to trust you."

Both saluted, and stood at attention.

"The mission," went on the general "if performed, will be performed for Gomez. It is at his order that I send you. You will remember that you are commissioned by the general of the Cuban forces."

"We will remember that general."

"And if you fail——"

"We will notify you, if possible, but you will never again see the faces of either of us."

Hal spoke with deep feeling.

"You will go first, then," resumed General Betancourt, "to Havana. As to how you are to get into the city without being captured, you yourselves must find the way."

"You will deliver this sealed letter, the contents of which you will know nothing, to the address on the envelope. It is addressed, as you will see, to a Senor Galvez, who is a loyal Cuban."

"Senor Galvez will give you the address of two pilots, who live near Havana. The government of the great and glorious United States is about to begin war in our behalf against Spain."

Though they had endeavored to listen without interruption, it was impossible for either Hal or Juan to repress cries of joy at this news, which they heard for the first time.

"The United States government has not yet acted," went on Betancourt. "But within a few days it will do so. These two pilots, who are experienced, must find a way to put off in a small boat and go to Key West. You are to go with them, both to help them, in case of trouble, and in order to place in the hands of our Cuban representative at Key West a letter which will be forwarded to Brigadier Generals Nunez and Castillo, who are now in the United States. Here is the letter."

Hal also received this epistle.

**TRUE BLUE—The Latest Patriotic Naval Weekly for Boys.**



"And here," continued General Betancourt, producing two more sealed envelopes, are duplicates of the same letters. Corporal Ramirez, you will take the duplicates.

"Now, pay particular heed to my further instructions. I am sending you two together for a special reason. It is that if anything happens to either, the other will have a chance left to get through. The one who finds himself in danger of capture by the Spanish will at once utterly destroy the correspondence in his possession. You are comrades?"

"More so than brothers would be, general," replied Juan Ramirez, slipping his hand through Hal's arm.

"Then here comes the hardest part of my instructions. Should you find yourselves in danger, neither will delay, even to save the life of the other. At the expense of abandoning one another, you will carry the mission through to success."

Hal and Juan looked deeply into each other's eyes, then turned to salute the general.

"Cuba first, general," replied both.

A tear glistened in Betancourt's eye, for the bravest men are apt to be the most emotional.

"Colonel have you writing paper and pen and ink?"

"Yes, my general."

"Lead the way, then. Gentlemen, wait."

In five minutes Betancourt came back.

"Gentlemen," he began, holding out a paper to each, "when you reach the United States fleet, you will want to be received by the officers on a footing of equality. Here are your commissions as lieutenants. They are provisional, of course, on General Gomez's approval, but I have no hesitation in assuring you that my act will be approved. Now, you

will start, as soon as you can get into clothes which bear no resemblance to uniforms."

In three minutes both youths were in different attire.

"Go, and God bless and prosper you, gentlemen," cried Betancourt, embracing them.

With parting salutes, Hal and Juan sprang into the saddles of waiting horses.

Six cavalry privates accompanied them.

Our friends had instructions to ride at a gallop as far as they could safely go on horseback, sending back their mounts with their escort as soon as they decided to take to their feet.

Both rode off in highest spirits. No work could be more dangerous than theirs, as they knew, but soldiers feel an elation in peril that leads to great results.

By four in the afternoon they were within fifteen miles of Havana.

"It is time to leave our horses," suggested Juan.

"Yes," agreed Hal.

Reining up, they sprang to the ground, transferring the bridles to two of the troopers.

Acknowledging the salute of the troopers, both boys plunged ahead through the woods, keeping, however, close to the road.

"You are the guide," whispered Hal. "You know the way; I do not."

"I know the way," nodded Ramirez. "I wish I also knew the way to pass the guards into Havana at ten o'clock to-night."

"We have hours to think out our plan."

Then, in silence, they tramped along for five miles.

Nestling in a cleared space away from



the road was a little hut, a poor, one-story affair with a thatched roof.

"I cannot help taking a last look," whispered Ramírez.

"Your home?" queried Hal.

"The home of Inez Constancia. My sweetheart. She was driven into Havana, she and her father. I have not seen them in more than a week. I do not know if they are still alive."

"By Jove," murmured Hal, pointing through the bushes to one of the paneless windows of the hut, "perhaps you can learn something by inquiring there."

"What do you mean?"

"I saw the whisk of a garment by the window, just then."

"I could not see, through my tears," cried Juan. "Can it be possible that the hut is desecrated by the presence of Spaniards."

"Unless something has happened to my eyes," projected Hal, "it was a woman's dress that I saw."

"Can it be possible that——" began Juan, eagerly, but broke down. "Mi amigo, do you think that I have a right to go softly to the door?"

"I hardly believe I could blame you if you did," was Hal's response.

Juan was off at once, though he went as stealthily as a cat.

At the door, he bent forward to look in.

There was a shout, a scream from within, then Juan vanished from view.

"Nothing in that, I guess, to worry me," smiled Hal.

He waited until Juan, radiant, reappeared in the doorway, waving his hand to beckon.

In another moment Hal was before the door.

"Enter, mi amigo," cried Juan, tremulously. "Inez permits me to invite you to enter."

Then Hal was presented to a dark-eyed, graceful Cuban girl, of whom Juan seemed tremendously proud.

Inez told them quickly how it happened that she was back in her home. To appease the United States, Spain had consented to allow the reconcentrados to return into the country.

In most cases this was mere mockery, for, since the country was bare of food, the reconcentrados who left the cities would have merely the opportunity to die more quickly of starvation.

"But we felt that we must see our home again," said Inez, tearfully. "Father and I came to-day. He is still out now, in the forest, to see if he can dig some roots that will take the place of food."

Hal could not help noticing with pity how thin Inez was.

"If we had not had some of the food which Consul General Lee distributed," she explained, "we should have been dead ere this. But——"

Suddenly Inez halted in her speech, her eyes growing large with terror.

Looking through the window, down the road, she saw a platoon of Spanish soldiers approaching.

Her companions saw the sight in the same instant.

"We must fly like the wind," faltered Juan, then looked mistily at Inez. "It is for Cuba," he added, "or we would not leave you."

"Cuba's women," responded Inez proudly, "urge the men to duty."

"How can we escape unseen?" wondered Hal.

Inez pointed to a door at the rear of the room.

"The woods are but ten feet from that door," she whispered.

"There is a Yankee pig there! For-



ward on the double quick!" shouted the officer at the head of the troops.

Hal Maynard's eyes blazed with sudden resolve.

"Juan," he whispered, "I have been seen. Were I to try to escape, we might both be caught. If you can get away unseen, you can succeed. Run, this instant! I must destroy my papers before they are found."

"The papers!" cried Inez, quickly. "Drop them there!"

She pulled up a short, loose board in the floor. Hal quickly dropped the papers out of sight.

"If the soldiers search?" he queried.

"I will set the cabin afire," responded Inez, with spirit. "It will burn like tinder."

"You have not gone?" cried Hal, turning upon Juan.

"Mi amigo," breathed the distressed Cuban, "it would be base to leave my comrade in the jaws of death."

"It would be baser still to betray Cuba," retorted Hal, vainly. "In an instant it will be too late for even you to escape. Remember your pledge—for Cuba!"

"Cuba first," answered Juan, brokenly.

Inez threw open the door, while Juan stepped through to the back of the hut.

Softly the door closed, and Inez turned to look at Lieutenant Maynard.

He stood by the door with folded arms, watching the soldiers who now spread before the front of the house.

"For Cuba!" he murmured, under his breath. "For dear old Uncle Sam, too!"

## Second Part.

### CHAPTER V.

#### FACING THE FIRING SQUAD.

Inze gave a sudden gasp of terror.

Spanish soldiers were rushing toward the rear of the house.

But Hal turned to flash a swift look at her.

"They will not catch Juan. He is already out of sight in the woods."

That was the message of comfort conveyed by a flash of the eyes.

In the doorway appeared the figure of a Spanish captain.

"He's cold-blooded—not excitable," was Hal's swift first impression.

"Senor," began the captain, nodding, "you will have some questions to answer."

"I am quite at your service, sir," answered Hal.

His assumption of coolness was a splendid piece of acting.

"You are an American."

"As you guessed a few moments ago."

"You have no right to be here."

"I have the senorita's permission. It is her father's house."

The Spaniard appeared disappointed.

Evidently he had expected to put Hal on the defensive.

"No Americans have any business out here in the country," continued the captain. As a race, you are enemies to Spain. It is my duty to arrest you."

"I will submit," retorted Hal, coolly.

"Do not attempt to make a virtue of your submission," said the Spaniard, coldly. "You submit because you have no chance to escape. Is it not so?"

"Yes."

Turning to two of his men, the captain commanded:

"Arrest him."

The soldiers placed themselves on either side of Hal.

"Take him out of here," was the next order.

Hal was led out of the hut, and at least a hundred feet away from it.

It was five minutes later when the captain came out.

**"CLIF FARADAY UNDER FIRE"—READ TRUE BLUE.**



He walked briskly to where Hal stood.

"Now, Senor Americano, I must question you. You are here on innocent business?"

"Yes, captain."

"Then you can have no objection to answering my questions truthfully. What business brought you here?"

This was an easy one for our hero.

Prompt and truthful was his answer.

"To see the Senorita Constancia."

"To see her for what purpose?"

This was more of a poser. Hal hesitated, yet only for an instant before he replied.

"The senorita and her father have no food. I came to offer them money."

"Why?"

Another easy one!

"Because I pity people who are starving."

The captain's eyes flashed suspiciously.

"Search the prisoner," he ordered.

Quickly and roughly the task was performed.

Not a peseta was found in the boy's pockets. Like a flash, when too late, Hal remembered that he had, in the instant of parting, instinctively pressed into his comrade's hand his few coins.

"So you have lied?" demanded the Spaniard.

Hal remained mute.

"Are you a wizard, that you can ring money out of stones when you happen to need it?"

At this sally, several of the soldiers laughed.

"Silence!" ordered the captain. "This will be no laughing matter for the prisoner. Now, then, you Yankee pig, confess your real reason for being here?"

"I have nothing to add," was Hal's rejoinder.

He saw clearly that to attempt further

evasion would be but to lead himself into a deeper tangle.

"Since you will not confess," broke in the captain, incisively, "let me tell you that all your actions are suspicious. The senorita, when questioned, told a much different story. She tried to shield you, but only condemned you by telling a story that differed with yours."

"Juan is far away from here by this time," thought Hal, inwardly. "May God speed him on to success!"

"Have you anything further to say?"

"Nothing, captain."

As the Spaniard gazed at our silent, self-possessed hero, he felt decidedly certain that he had made an important capture.

"Senor," he said, coaxingly, "are you aware that, if you are able to give me information of any value, you will earn, not only my thanks, but your own safety?"

At this insinuation, Hal looked the other steadily in the face, but did not speak.

"Your answer, Senor Americano?"

"I have no such information."

"That is your great misfortune, senor."

"You mean, I suppose," projected Hal, "that you will have me sent into Havana? That I shall be kept a prisoner?"

"And let British Consul Gollan add another to the list of Americans whose release he has secured?" sneered the captain. "I am not so simple. Since you refuse to tell me as much as I am certain you could, I shall dispose of your case at once. Senor, I do not wish to be cruel. If you are a Christian, I grant you five minutes to prepare yourself for death."

"Death?" echoed Hal.

Then instantly he became cold and hard as marble.

"Death, certainly," responded the captain. "I myself impose the sentence; four of my soldiers will execute it."

**CLIF FARADAY IN ACTION—READ TRUE BLUE.**



Senor, while you are praying, you may, if you see fit, say a brief prayer for the soul of Captain Manuëlo Lucha when it comes his turn to follow you into the next world. Possibly you can pray for the man who declares your life forfeited."

"Perhaps you will tell me," proposed Hal, "for what reason I am to be shot?"

"Because I am convinced that you are an enemy to Spain. I am doing my duty. But we are intruding upon the five minutes that I would recommend you to devote to the good of your soul."

And Lucha, turning on his heel, walked away.

Hal remained standing where he was, but closed his eyes and prayed.

It was a soldier's prayer—but fervent.

Then, opening his eyes, he approached the captain.

"I am ready, sir!"

It was simply, bravely said, but Lucha heard him without emotion.

"Remove your hat and coat, senor. I will show you where to kneel while facing the squad."

"Your men will shoot straight, I trust."

"They are marksmen," was Lucha's cold answer.

Hal dropped his hat to the ground, next coolly drew off his jacket and proceeded to fold it.

From the hut came a sob.

Tears streaming from her eyes, Inez ran forth, darted toward Captain Lucha, and fell upon his knees before him.

"Captain," she cried, wildly, "I beg you not to do this infamous thing."

"Senorita, an officer of Spain needs no advice about his duty from Cubans."

"But I assure you, senor capitan, that this American has been guilty of no offense against Spain."

"Poor child, I don't want her to lie for me," thought Hal, with a choking in his throat.

"Rise and go away, senorita," ordered Lucha, firmly. "This Yankee pig has been offered a chance to save his life, but he refuses to accept the boon of pardon."

Inez rose, brushing the tears from her eyes. There was a hard, defiant look in her eyes as she went on, hurriedly:

"Captain, if you commit this awful crime, what will become of your own soul when you stand before the Seat of Mercy?"

"I shall give the order to fire in a moment."

"Then, senor capitan," cried the girl, "I pray Heaven to show you your wickedness by rendering your cartridges worthless."

"Leave us, senorita."

"Let me, too, beg you to go," interposed Hal, gently. "This ordeal, Senorita Inez, will be doubly painful for me if I know that your mournful eyes are beholding it."

"Go away from here," insisted Lucha, sternly, "or I will order my men to take you away under guard."

One terrified, appealing look Inez threw at the captain, then, with a sob, turned and tottered back to the cabin.

"Pass the word for the firing squad," ordered the captain.

Inez started, then shuddered as a sound behind her caused her to turn around.

Out of the cabin filed four private soldiers. They had already been told off, and were ready.

Shouldering their rifles, they went over to Lucha, saluted, and then formed in line, resting the butts of their rifles on the ground.

"Here is where you will kneel," stated the captain, drawing an "x" on the ground with his sword. "Will you face the soldiers, or would it be easier for your nerves if you kneel looking the other way?"

There was a sneer in his voice that brought a hot flush to Hal Maynard's cheek.

"I will face the guns," he answered, coldly.

"Your hands, of course, must be tied behind you."

"As you like."

Lucha signaled to a soldier who stood



near by with a cord dangling from one hand.

In a moment more that cord was knotted securely about Hal's wrists.

"Kneel," came the command.

All of Hal Maynard's blood seemed suddenly turned to ice. He was face to face with death at last! Not the death that a soldier meets while charging gallantly with his comrades in the moment of triumph; not the death a hero meets while stubbornly fighting a last forlorn hope.

It was the death of ignominy—the death that is meted out to spies and deserters.

It would be false to say that he was not afraid. He was frigid with fear, so frigid that he did not tremble.

"Thirty seconds more of courage," murmured the boy, inwardly. "Thirty seconds, and then——"

Even while this broken thought was passing through his mind he sank to his knees.

Outwardly he was calm. No sign of his thoughts showed in his face.

"A brave man," thought the captain, calmly. "What a good soldier he would make for Spain!"

The soldiers were lifting their rifles. Hal watched them. His last qualm of fear was gone now.

In these last seconds of life he was astonished to note how closely his resignation resembled indifference.

In that very instant a wild shriek was heard. Inez, watching from the doorway, again felt forced to run forward.

Agitated as she was, her voice rang loud and clear:

"I have prayed the Virgin," she cried, "to destroy your aim—to spoil your cartridges, so that they will do no harm."

"Silence, you vixen," uttered the captain.

But Inez, unheeding, ran forward, as if intent on casting herself between our hero and the firing squad.

"Aim!" came in Captain Lucha's clear, cold tones.

Inez threw herself forward, only to be repulsed as the fateful word came:

"Fire!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### INEZ'S "MIRACLE."

Snap!

With one sound the hammers of the four pieces descended.

The flash was minus. Noise there was none.

All four pieces had missed fire.

"How, now?" demanded Captain Lucha, angrily. "Did you four dolts fail to load your pieces?"

One after the other the soldiers opened their pieces at the breech.

Each took out a cartridge, staring blankly at it.

"You see, my captain," replied one of the men, "my rifle was loaded as it should have been."

"But how could four pieces miss fire at once?"

It was Inez who supplied the answer:

"My prayer was heard. It triumphed. Thus did Heaven interfere to save an innocent life!"

She fell upon her knees in an ecstasy of thanksgiving.

"A miracle!" cried several of the soldiers. Then, for a few moments, a hush of awe fell over the command.

Even Captain Lucha looked perturbed.

Hal looked on curiously, understanding little except that he lived.

"We will try four other guns," said Captain Lucha.

In an instant Inez was on her feet.

"Have you not witnessed Heaven's interposition?" she cried, earnestly. "If you still persist in trying to kill this innocent man, are you not afraid that the next time you go into battle you will all find your weapons useless?"

Blankly enough the soldiers glanced at one another.

The girl's devout belief did not fail to impress them.

Even Captain Lucha was more perturbed than he would allow to be seen.

One after another the soldiers began to shake their heads.

Lucha, while a resolute commander, was also a wise one in his way.

"If you, my men, desire it," he went on, "I will declare the prisoner's life spared."



"It would be safer, my captain, I believe," replied an old sergeant.

"At least," responded their commander, "it would be more satisfactory to me if it pleased the heroes who follow me."

That diplomatic speech won the men.

"Well," said the captain, dubiously, as he approached our hero, "it seems that you are not to be shot. We shall have to send you in to Havana, instead."

"If you take him as a prisoner," put in Inez, "some disaster will befall your command."

"Ha, you vixen! You prophesy that?" cried Lucha, wheeling upon the girl.

"I prophesy nothing," she faltered.

"You pray for it, nevertheless?"

"I do not even pray for it," responded Inez. "It is an inner consciousness that tells me what will happen if you persecute further this young man who is neither Spaniard nor Cuban. I see before my eyes a picture of your men overwhelmed, cut down, annihilated."

As she spoke, Inez turned her face to the skies. Her very earnestness made her look like one inspired.

"A prophetress!" cried the soldiers. "Hidden things are revealed to her."

Things were going a little too far to suit the captain. He saw his men in danger of becoming demoralized. He himself did not fear either to shoot Hal, or to take him along as prisoner, but he clearly saw that it would now provoke great dissatisfaction among his men to do either.

"My men," he proposed, "shall we let this Yankee pig go altogether?"

"Yes, yes, captain!" called several.

"Who knows? Who cares?" answered a few, shrugging their shoulders.

"Now, then, my Joan of Arc," cried Lucha, bantering, "what do you say? If we grant your wish, shall we accomplish glorious deeds? Will the arms of Spain triumph?"

"You ask more than I can tell you," replied Inez simply. "This much I say to you that if you harm the young American then is disaster sure."

Lucha frowned, but saw nevertheless that her words had great weight with his men.

"Fall in!" he ordered. "By fours. Forward, march!"

With long strides the men marched, if anxious to get away from the scene before which their leader changed mind.

Inez, her face transfigured with joy, watched the soldiers as they passed rapidly out of sight up the road.

"Senorita Inez, I owe you more than I could voice in a year."

It was Hal who spoke. He had struggled to his feet, and was now tugging unsuccessfully at the cord around his wrists.

"Oh, Senor Maynard," she cried, confusedly, "indeed I owe you my apologies. I was so happy that I forgot you were bound."

Then her light-hearted laughter rippled out as she approached and began to undo with her nimble fingers, the knots tied by a Spanish soldier.

"My head is all in a whirl," confessed Hal, as they walked toward the cabin together. "I was prepared for death, and now I find myself quite as much alive as ever."

He stood aside for her to enter, and did not follow until Inez indicated by a gesture that he was to do so.

"How did it happen?" Hal pondered. "Surely all the rifles were loaded, and yet every cartridge missed fire."

"There can be no mystery about your wonderful escape, senor," the girl answered, simply. "You were saved through the guidance of Heaven!"

"Now, by all that is wonderful, that is a new and strange name for me!" cried a laughing voice.

Up went a plank in the floor, while under it came the laughing face of Juan Ramirez.

"You?" cried the girl, amazed, and then a look of recollection came over her face.

"Of course," replied Juan, easily. "Did you not get my letter, dear girl?"

"I heard a hiss, saw a piece of paper protrude through the floor, picked up the paper, read what was written on it, and then——"

"And then," laughed Juan, "you became so full of the purpose with which that writing inspired you that you immediately forgot all else."

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"It is true," admitted Inez, blushing. Hal Maynard had already been surged up to the limit. That was why he did not now break in to demand how it happened that Juan, instead of being miles away, was no more than two feet

While the dialogue had been going on, Juan remained with only his head and shoulders above the floor.

Now he disappeared briefly. When he returned to view, it was to observe:

"Your papers, mi amigo. So far we have neither lost our papers, nor been obliged to destroy them."

Then, drawing himself up, and replacing the board, Ramirez rattled on:

"You are curious to know how it is that I am here, instead of nearer to Havana."

"Guilty," acknowledged Hal.

"Well, then," resumed Juan, "when the door closed, I became filled with misgivings that I could not reach the woods without being seen by some of the soldiers. If that happened, they were likely to fire upon me before I could dispose of my papers. What was I to do? In my predicament I looked around me. Down on my feet I noticed a bit of board that had been kicked off. There was room to crawl under the floor of the cabin. Here," thought I, "is an excellent hiding-place for both myself and my papers." I crawled in without more ado."

"And then?" demanded Hal, full of keen interest.

"Then I waited, and kept quiet until I heard how things were going. Four soldiers tramped into the cabin. 'If the Yankee pig is to be shot,' I heard one of them say, 'we four are the ones detailed to do the shooting.'"

"With that they put down their guns, unimagined about the cabin for something to eat, found it not, of course, and then entered outside. Up went that plank, an inch or so. There was no one in sight at that instant. I got up here in the room, after leaving my papers behind. It was quick work—it had to be—and my fingers must have trembled, but when I appeared under the floor again, each one of the cartridges had been tampered

with. The powder in each had been withdrawn, but the bullets replaced.

"Down below there in the semi-dark I made fingers fly with pencil and paper. Just as I had finished, I heard this dear girl's step on the floor. As she came nearer, I hissed, shoved the paper up. Inez did the rest."

"That writing," put in Inez, "told me what to say about praying that their cartridges would prove worthless. I did as you asked, did I not, my Juan."

"You did, and more," laughed her lover. "Well did I know the dear girl's devout nature. As soon as the cartridges missed fire, she began to believe that Heaven had worked a miracle in your behalf, mi amigo. But how about the inspired prophetess, carissima? How about the Joan of Arc?"

"Now you are laughing at me," remonstrated the girl.

"Not I," answered Juan, instantly returning to seriousness. "All came out about as I had hoped. Your devoutness, combined with the seeming miracle, filled the soldiers with such awe that——"

Juan shrugged his shoulders before adding:

"Well, the soldiers marched away, without attempting to imprint any kisses upon your lips—a crime which would have driven me to spring out of my concealment and kill at least two or three of them."

Inez blushed furiously, but Hal, rising, bowed with a respect almost bordering on reverence.

"I shall never cease to remember Senorita Constancia, and I shall always think of her with deepest gratitude. Juan, I shall wait for you in the woods."

Hal strode away, but was hardly under the trees when Ramirez reached his side.

"And now for Havana," breathed the Cuban.

Without any clear plan of how they were to pass the sentinels they journeyed on.

Chance decided the matter for them, for when, in the dead of night, they had got about as near to Havana as they could with safety, they came upon an inn.

Outside the door were three wagons

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drawn up in line. The spot was so near the outer line of sentinels that the soldiers escorting the wagons had gone into the inn to drink a few bottles of wine for which they would not pay.

"Wagons loaded with grass. Intended for the cavalry horses of Havana no doubt," conjectured Ramirez. "Headed for the city, too."

Ascertaining this much, both stole up to the wagons.

There was little difficulty in burrowing themselves under the grass.

Before long the horses were started.

Without even an alarm of possible discovery they reached Havana in this fashion.

There the wagons were left in a square, near one of the barracks. There being no danger that the starving people of Havana would attempt to eat the grass, the three wagons were left standing there, while the guard tramped off to its rest.

Juan was first to crawl out and step to the ground.

"The way is clear, mi amigo," he whispered. "And now to find the house of Senor Galvez."

## CHAPTER VII.

### HAVANA'S REIGN OF TERROR.

There was no need to look at the address written on the duplicate envelopes.

Both knew it by heart.

In addition, Ramirez knew the city like a guide book.

"It is only a question of getting along the streets, at this late hour, without falling into the hands of the patrol," he whispered.

Fortunately, they had not far to go.

Twice on the way they were compelled to hide in doorways, and both times they narrowly escaped being discovered; but at the end of fifteen minutes they stood before Senor Galvez's house.

"If we make any racket arousing him," commented Hal, dryly, "we shall have had all our pains so far for nothing. The streets seem fairly alive with patrols."

"We shall make no noise," responded Juan. "Fortunately, our man has an electric bell to his door."

They pressed the button, and waited. Presently, they pressed it again.

After what seemed an age, the door opened an inch or two.

"What do you want?" demanded a voice.

"To see Senor Galvez."

"Who are you?" and the door was almost closed before Juan could whisper:

"Viva Cuba libre!"

Thereupon the door would have closed altogether had not Juan already succeeded in getting the toe of his boot into the crack.

"Would you like to hear from General Gomez?" propounded Juan.

This question had the effect of causing the door to open some six inches.

Both youths saw an anxious face—the face of a man of about forty-five.

"Who are you?" muttered this man again.

"Two officers from the Cuban army."

The door opened a little more, though the man still continued to block the way.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"First of all to come in, so that we shall not be pounced upon by a patrol party. For you will subject us to grave peril, if you do not instantly admit us."

Perceiving that they were alone, the house's tenant swung the door wide open.

"Step in," he whispered.

No sooner had they done so than their host, after noiselessly closing the door, bolted it securely.

All three now stood in the dark.

"Will you allow me to suggest," came from Hal, "that it would be much more satisfactory all around, if we could have a little light?"

"Certainly; wait a moment."

Gliding into a nearby room, their host lighted a lamp before inviting them in.

"You see," he whispered, nodding toward the curtains, "it is necessary to have the windows well covered if one wants to burn a light at night. I am satisfied, now, that you are Cubans, from the army, as you say, but I was obliged to be cautious at first. Senors, these last few days have been frightful in Havana. All the native Cubans left in the city have been arrested. I should hesitate to tell you how many have been arrested,



within the last few days. Morro's dungeons must be very well filled, if all the suspected Cubans who have been sent here have passed safely over Havana harbor."

Sinking his voice to a whisper of horror, their host added:

"But many of them, I fear, have never survived the passage of the harbor. There are frightful stories told of what has been done to our poor people. Apparently, the Spanish are determined that, if the United States drives them out of this island, they will leave no Cubans behind. I am a marked man. Really, senors, I am surprised to find myself still free. Every night I have looked for a police visitation. When my bell rang a few minutes ago, I was sure that the blow was about to fall. But your letter?"

"Is addressed to Senor Galvez," responded Hal.

"I am he."

Hal and Juan each produced their letters.

"Take your choice," smiled Ramirez, for they are both the same."

Galvez took both envelopes, and broke their seals.

"You have told me truly," he cried, after glancing at the signature of one of the letters. "It is from General Gomez." For some minutes he read attentively, without looking up.

When he did glance at his visitors, it was to observe:

"There are matters in this which require the consideration of the Junta."

The Junta, or Revolutionary Committee of the insurgents, existed in Havana as well as in New York.

"The Junta?" echoed Hal. "Then we must have some time to wait before proceeding further?"

"Do you not know?" smiled Galvez. But I see that you do not. Well, since you were intrusted with this letter, it is evident that you are young men who are to be trusted. Therefore, I will tell you at the Junta meets here. All the members are at present sleeping in this house. I will rouse them; and lay before them the matters upon which General Gomez's letter touches."

Then, as he was leaving the room, Galvez turned to say:

"I can see that you are both tired out. There is a sofa for one to sleep in, a big chair for the other. Sleep well, gentlemen, if you can."

Tired out as they were, neither Hal nor Juan needed a second invitation.

But Galvez looked in again, a minute later, to add:

"Gentlemen, if there is a visitation by police or soldiers, remain where you are until I appear to lead you to a place of hiding. Above all, should you hear the blows of sledge-hammer descending on my door, do not make any sound that can be heard from the street. And, with your permission, I will extinguish the light."

Neither young Cuban officer knew when their host left the room again. They slept without waking or stirring, until their host returned some hours later.

But at the first touch of his hand, Hal Maynard awoke and sat up. That much came of their life in the field.

An instant later Juan was rubbing his eyes.

"Why," he exclaimed, looking toward the windows, "it is daylight."

"Judge how soundly you have slept," smiled Galvez. "Well, then, the Junta has been in session all the time you slept. We have made our plans. We are ready to instruct you in the next steps in the programme."

"And we," rejoined Hal, rising, "are ready to carry them out."

"Lieutenant Ramirez, do you know where La Jova is?"

"Yes, senor; a fishing village ten miles west of Havana."

"Perhaps, then, you are also aware where the brothers Cantalba live?"

"No, senor; my knowledge does not go that far."

"Do you know where a small cabin stands, at the inner bend of the inlet?"

"I know it well. And that is where we shall find the two brothers?"

"It is where they will find you," replied Galvez, with a shrewd twinkle in his eyes. "They are not so silly as to live at home in these times. You will



walk in front of the cabin. One will walk with his hat off; the other will carry a handkerchief in his hand. After being thus five minutes in front of the cabin, you will go inside. At least one of the brothers will soon join you. At your request he will show you a half a card, which will match the piece I am now handing you. The completed card will be instructions for the Cantalba brothers to set sail for Key West. You will go with them, in order to mail the letters you bear. Having completed your work, in case you find it difficult to return to Cuba, you are both at liberty to offer your services to the United States, since Free Cuba and Uncle Sam are now allies."

"All is plain, senor," replied Ramirez, bowing. "We have but one difficulty left—to find a way out of Havana, past the sentries."

"Oh, as to that," laughed Senor Galvez, "you should not find it difficult. Here are two passes, which should take you past any sentries or guard posts that you may encounter."

"Passes?" echoed Hal.

Galvez shrugged his shoulders.

"Forged, of course, you understand, senor lieutenant. But the work is so well done that many of our people have used them successfully. To be sure, if you are suspected and detained, it will mean the end of your careers before the rifles of a firing squad."

"If that experience is no more harmful than my last one in that line," smiled Hal, "I shall not mind it."

"Then, gentlemen, you decide to use the passes?"

"I think," replied Hal, "it is safer than to make the attempt without passes at all."

Ramirez promptly nodded approval.

"Good! excellent!" cried Galvez, beaming. "Now, I would advise you to show further boldness by engaging a carriage to take you out of Havana."

This advice was accepted. Leaving Galvez, after warm handshakings, Hal and his comrade went to the next square, where they were fortunate enough to secure a carriage.

Into this they got, giving the driver his directions.

The latter regarded them seriously.

"You have passes, senors, to go beyond the lines?"

"Oh, assuredly," responded Hal, producing his. Then, lowering his voice, he added: "We go on business that is of great moment to General Blanco."

Which statement was utterly true, though far from true in the sense in which the jehu understood it.

But the man on the box now gave prompt response by whipping his horses ahead.

Though halted fully a dozen times by sentries and patrols, the forged passes proved sufficient to send them each time on their way again.

"I breathe more easily," admitted Hal, when Havana had been left three miles to the rear.

"We will not use the driver much further," whispered Juan. "I have purposely given him somewhat wrong directions. Leave it all to me."

Hal nodded. Accordingly, when the carriage had gone two miles further along the road, Juan looked about him.

There were no houses in sight at that point.

"Stop here," directed Juan. "Driver, you will wait for us one-half hour. We will pay you now, so that, if at the end of just thirty minutes we have not returned, you will go back to Havana without us."

"I shall do as you direct, senor."

"And remember that, as we are from General Blanco, you will not gossip about our trip to any one outside of officials who may question you. If you do," added Juan, with a quiet menace that made the jehu fidget, "you are likely to find yourself in trouble at the Palace."

"Oh, your excellencies!" protested the driver. "I am a loyal subject of Spain."

Juan smiled comically at his American comrade as they plodded along the road out of sight of the conveyance.

"I am feeling more comfortable," admitted Hal, in a low tone. "So long as we were in Havana, or near it, I dreaded lest our plans should be spoiled by that



unplacable enemy of mine, Senor Vasquez."

"Speaking of——" began Juan.  
 "The devil!" finished Hal, in a startled voice.

Just ahead of them, there came around a bend in the road a mounted man.

Only one glance was needed to show them who the horseman was——

Senor Enrique Vasquez!

### Third Part.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

"NEXT STOP, MORRO!"

"Yes, the devil, indeed!" whispered Juan Ramirez.

So far neither had halted, nor, they were confident, had their faces betrayed their surprise.

"Does he know you?" whispered Hal, without turning his head.

"I think not," responded Juan.

"Then we will pretend that we do not know him, either."

Had the boys betrayed their actual surprise it might have escaped the notice of the Spaniard.

For he was more than astounded—he appeared badly frightened.

His lips trembled, his eyes appeared bulging from his head.

"Is it possible?" he faltered, reining up his horse.

For Senor Vasquez at first thought he saw a ghost!

"Good-day, senor!" hailed Hal Maynard, boldly approaching the Spaniard.

Our hero smiled and lifted his hat as he approached.

"Senor Maynard!" stammered the Spaniard, reaching for the pistol in his holster.

"Surely," cried Hal, feigning astonishment, "you are a gentleman. Then it must be that you take us for highwaymen. Reassure yourself. We are honest gentlemen."

"Senor Maynard," repeated the Spaniard, now nervously fingering his revolver.

Under the circumstances Hal required the utmost exercise of his self-control to continue outwardly cool.

Again lifting his hat he asked:

"Can it be possible that the senor mistakes me for some one else?"

By this time Vasquez had evidently assured himself that the form facing him was not the unsubstantial one of a ghost.

He regarded Hal with a puzzled look that was far from friendly.

It was Juan who came to the rescue at this moment by observing in an undertone:

"Senor Bascomb, I feel quite certain that this excellent man no longer suspects that we are unfriendly."

As low as Ramirez's tone was, Vasquez overheard his words, as the Cuban had intended that he should.

"Bascomb?" repeated Vasquez, wonderingly.

"It is the name I have the honor to bear," replied Hal.

"You are not an American?"

"No; an Englishman."

It cut Hal to the quick to deny his Americanism, even when dealing with such a fellow as this Spanish merchant, but he felt that the circumstances warranted it, for he was on an important mission in the way of which no delicacy could be allowed to stand.

"The resemblance is so striking," murmured the Spaniard aloud.

"Ah, I conjectured rightly, then when I supposed that the senor had mistaken me for one he knew—a friend or perhaps an enemy?"

"Neither," stammered Vasquez. "Merely an acquaintance whom I thought had left the island."

"I am extremely sorry to have been the cause of any uneasiness to the senor," responded Hal, again lifting his hat.

Hal's manner was so friendly, his tone so courteous—his whole bearing so free from either fear or enmity, that Vasquez was utterly puzzled.

"I apologize for my mistake," he said, quickly. "Should we ever meet again, Senor Bascomb, I trust I shall be able to be of service to you. I am named Vasquez."

"Vasquez," repeated Hal. "Though I have never heard the name before, I shall remember it. I return your hope that on some future occasion one will be able to be of service to the other."



Still keeping the pistol in his hand, Vasquez edged his horse by on the side of the road.

Past them he turned long enough to wave his hand, then galloped swiftly toward Havana.

"A close squeeze," grimaced Juan. "Had he been inclined to be ugly, he would have had the advantage of us with his pistol, since we are unarmed."

"He wasn't deceived," palpitated Hal. "He only declined to risk himself in an encounter. By this time he must be talking with the driver whom we left waiting."

"It is time to take to the woods, then," declared the Cuban.

Without delay, they plunged into the depths of the forest. From time to time they came to a spot whence they could get a glimpse of the road. Whenever they did so they surveyed the neighborhood with extreme caution.

Yet they progressed for more than an hour without seeing any signs of pursuit.

"Is there any telegraph line that would aid in stopping us further on?" queried Hal.

"None," answered Ramirez, "that runs in the direction we are headed."

"Don't think me a croaker," uttered Hal, with a grim smile, but I am far from satisfied that we deceived our enemy. I shall expect news from Senor Vasquez up to the moment that we are safely on the water."

Juan nodded, leading the way deeper into the forest.

This way proved, too, to be a shorter cut.

Ere long they stood on a low hill, looking down at the tiny harbor of La Jova.

There lay the cabin described by Senor Galvez. In the neighborhood were other huts and cabins.

"But not so much as the sign of a dweller there," sighed Ramirez. "What a wilderness of deserted homes Cuba has become!"

Cutting short this mournful strain of thought, they strode down upon the beach.

There, before the empty cabin of the Cantalbas our young scouts walked back and forth, giving the signal agreed upon.

After a few minutes a man bronzed and weatherbeaten came toward them from the nearest strip of woods.

He looked them over keenly. Both felt sure that he was one of the brothers they sought.

"You are looking for something of some one?" hailed the newcomer.

"Yes," spoke up Hal, "looking for a piece of card that we have mislaid."

"A half a card?" queried the stranger.

"Yes."

"Let me see your half."

Hal promptly produced the piece given him by Senor Galvez.

"They match," nodded the stranger.

"And you are Senor Cantalba?"

"I am one of them. So you are from the——"

But Cantalba sank his voice to a whisper before he finished.

"From the Junta in Havana?"

"More recently," assented our hero. "But our mission started from General Gomez himself."

At mention of that revered name of the greatest of all Cuban patriots, Cantalba pulled off the little that was left of his cap.

"You have come to order my brother and myself to go to Key West, to pilot the Yankee squadron through these waters?"

"Yes, but we are to go with you. We are charged with the delivery of some letters in the United States."

"We will start to-night," proposed Cantalba.

"Why not now?"

"It would mean death—but, worst of all, the spoiling of your plans and ours. Since yesterday a Spanish gunboat has been prowling back and forth in this neighborhood. Of the few small boats that were left on this coast all have been captured or destroyed except ours. We have hidden it so that I do not believe the Spaniards can find it. It would be madness to put out before dark."

"You are right, my friend," agreed Hal.

"Diablo!" growled Ramirez, suddenly. "Just now I saw a head bob up on that hill over yonder. Then it disappeared. Some one is watching us, and it is near."



road on which we met Senor Vasquez."

"Vasquez?" cried Cantalba, looking disturbed. "Do you know him?"

"Slightly," grimly vented Hal.

"He dealt much with us when La Jova was really a fishing village," went on Cantalba. "Every fisherman here grew to hate him. Vasquez owed money to all of us. When we pressed him for payment, he procured the sending of Spanish troops here. You see what La Jova is now!"

Cantalba's eyes flashed with hate, but he suddenly recollected himself, and added:

"If we are watched, we must lose no time in getting out of sight. Follow me, brothers, and do not mind a few scratches from thorns."

It was well that their guide gave the warning. Hardly had they gained the shelter of the trees when Cantalba led them to a shallow ravine that deepened as it progressed.

Here the growth of high thorn-covered bushes rendered passage extremely difficult.

Yet the same bushes that tortured them sheltered them, for, crawling between them down close to the ground, all three were hidden from view.

"Here we are," whispered their guide, for they had traveled some hundred yards.

"The end?" breathed Hal. "Thank goodness!"

Pushing aside a thick growth of more innocent-looking bushes, Cantalba showed them the mouth of a tunnel into the hillside.

"Creep in, without fear," whispered

Hal went first, Juan next, their guide bringing last of all.

At the end of the tunnel, which was no more than a dozen feet long, they came upon a shaft up which a rude ladder ran.

"Climb up," desired Cantalba. "My brother knows who is coming, for he has been talking together."

Hal climbed some twenty rungs, when a grave voice just overhead informed him:

"You are welcome, senor."

It was the other Cantalba who spoke. Yet Hal could not have told him from their guide. They were twins, and the resemblance was striking.

Our hero now found himself standing on the boarded floor of a dug-out cave some twelve feet square.

From the shore side came considerable light through a round, yard-wide hole. Yet this light was filtered through the green leaves of bushes that grew just outside the aperture.

"A queer place, is it not?" murmured their guide. "Yet it answers our purpose, for, as you now see, by pushing aside the leaves ever so little we are able to look out and down upon the harbor and our cabin. It was while looking out through this aperture that my brother first saw you."

"Yet it is frightful," gritted Juan, "that Cubans who would serve their country are thus reduced to living the underground life of snakes."

"Oh, we have not much of which to complain," rejoined one of the brothers. "We at least are able to live near our old home. Nor are we so hungry as many of the Cubans, for on dark nights we are often able to get out and fish for hours."

It was simply said. These men had for more than a year braved death by defying the infamous reconcentrado order. They had known little of food save the monotonous fare of fish. In that climate their one kind of food would not keep from day to day without ice. In the moonlit part of the month they had frequently gone without food for days and nights at a time.

But they had never complained. Now, as they told their almost incredible story of suffering to Gomez's Yankee scout, the Cantalba brothers did not seem imbued with any notion that they had been martyrs to the cause of Cuban independence.

Since they had first constructed this dug-out cave, which answered the triple purpose of home, hiding place and lookout post, they had not once deserted their duty.

From time to time they had made voyages, by stealth, between the Havana Junta and the Cuban colony at Key West. At other times they had arranged for the



secret landings of filibustering expeditions. Many a filibustering expedition has been landed on Cuban soil under the very nose of Havana! It was the Cantalbas brothers who always managed such affairs.

Next they discussed the new orders which had come from General Gomez through the Havana Junta.

Our young friends spent much of the day in sleeping, but the two brothers kept alternate watch of the beach.

"We cannot offer you anything to eat," smiled one of the Cantalbas, sadly. "We had some fish, but it had begun to smell so badly that we were obliged to throw it out."

Just after dark one of the brothers disappeared down the shaft.

"There have been people prowling in the neighborhood," he reported, when he came back a half an hour later.

"Are they still in the neighborhood?" quivered Hal, thinking at once of Vasquez and his "agents."

"I cannot say. But I am going for our boat now. In an hour it will be in the harbor."

And in an hour the fact was accomplished, for the other brother and our young scouts, standing on the deserted beach, saw a small sloop coming into the inlet.

Her bow grounded, close to where they stood.

"The water but is empty," murmured he who had acted as skipper. "We must fill it from the spring."

He handed two buckets to his brother, two to Juan, and was about to do the same for our hero when his brother interposed:

"Paulo, we should leave at least one of our number here to guard the craft."

"True, Jose, I had forgotten. Then Senor Maynard will stay here."

"Willingly," nodded Hal, "but suppose I should be attacked? I am not armed, you know. Juan and I did not think it wise to bring so much as pocket knives with us."

"Here is my revolver," whispered Paulo.

Taking the weapon in his hand, Hal sat down across the bow of the craft.

He watched his three comrades go out of sight up the shore, swinging their buckets gently as they walked. He lost sight of them as they disappeared among the shadows.

By this time our hero was actively watching the entire beach.

"I can see a prowler at a good distance here," he mused.

A sudden rustling in a pile of sailcloth behind him caused him to turn swiftly.

Too late! One pair of hands gripped at the wrist which controlled the pistol; another pair clutched at his throat, strangling him, while a third pair of hands drew him bodily into the boat.

Getting control of the pistol, the assailant who had reached for it now thrust it into his belt and leaped ashore.

Leaving his other two comrades to battle with Hal, he pushed the sloop into deeper water, next ran astern, and took his place at sheet and tiller.

Overwhelmed at the outset, Hal Maynard was quickly rendered helpless. His hands and feet were bound by the time that the boat was moving through the water.

Hal made good use of his lungs, however, nor did the Spaniards try to stop his shouting.

"Look through his pockets," called the fellow at the stern.

"A sealed letter and a folded paper," replied another of the trio after rummaging Hal's clothing.

"Bring them to me."

"Where have I heard that scoundrel's voice before?" wondered Hal. "Now I know. It is Pedro, Vasquez's worst rascal of all!"

Only stopping for breath, Maynard again shouted lustily to those left behind on shore.

What could have happened to them that they did not answer?

Flare! Pedro struck a match to examine the two finds.

"The paper," he chuckled, "is a commission in the Cuban army. It will hang our young friend. The letter will keep until it is opened by the proper persons."

By this time the sloop was clear of the harbor.

**CLIF FARADAY IN ACTION—READ TRUE BLUE.**



Rising in his seat, Pedro chuckled:  
 "The next stop will be at Morro  
 castle!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### PEDRO HAS THE "DROP."

"Diablo, my comrade! Look astern!"  
 Pedro wheeled swiftly around, scanning the waters for an instant.

"Diablo, indeed!" he growled.  
 This is what had happened:

Juan and the Cantalba brothers, hearing Hal's cries, had gone swiftly but quietly to a point on the beach nearer the mouth of the inlet.

Here they had noiselessly taken to the water, swimming after the sloop.

Had they not been discovered when they were they would have overtaken the craft.

But, forewarned, Pedro brought the boat around more before the wind.

At the same time the one who had snatched the pistol from Hal opened fire upon the three heads bobbing in the water.

"Diablo!" growled the poor marksman after peering to see what effect his shots had taken, "I cannot hit anything in this darkness."

"It is not worth while to shoot," laughed Pedro. "Every moment I am making your task more difficult, my comrade, for I am putting the boat ahead so fast that we are leaving them in the arch. They must soon turn back to land and drown."

After that the three masters of the boat gave themselves little concern over Hal's three floating comrades.

One by one the heads were swallowed up in the darkness.

"We shall have a fine sail to Havana," observed Pedro, scanning the sky.

Then, turning his malicious attention to our hero, he asked:

"Senor Maynard, you were only a gringo—a Yankee—when we last met you. Have you any idea what the people of Morro Castle do to Cuban officers who are found with commissions and correspondence in their pockets?"

Hal, lying helpless on the deck forward, made no response.

"It is a pity," continued Pedro, tauntingly, "that you have not two lives, since you are at once a Yankee and a Cuban officer?"

"He is thinking," jeered another of the trio, after waiting a moment. "A gringo in his fix must have such pleasant thoughts that it is a pity to interrupt them."

Hal was thinking, but in a very different strain from that with which he was credited.

He had quickly guessed how the Spaniards had come to be aboard the boat. They had discovered it just before Paulo boarded it at its place of concealment. Under the sailcloth they had found ample room for hiding themselves away.

Thus concealed, they had been conveyed around to the inlet.

They had only to wait until the other three departed in quest of water before they made their onslaught upon the American.

"It was I they wanted," muttered Hal. "I am in the hands of Vasquez's rascals, and they would hardly concern themselves about my comrades. Vasquez must be dissatisfied with the result of our last meeting. He means to make sure of my death this time. But he won't."

All the time Hal's brain was moving his muscles had not been less busy.

Now he found, with a thrill of exultation, that he would soon be able to work his hands free.

To throw his enemies off their guard, he began to snore.

"The Yankee pigs are always sleepy," jeered Pedro.

"Shall I wake him, comrade?"

"No, for if he is asleep he is out of mischief."

Maynard's heart throbbed, for he found his hands free at last.

"There are the feet, though," quivered Hal. "That will be hardest of all, for if they see me sitting up my last chance is gone."

Flare! Pedro touched a lighted match to a cigarette. His companions joined him in smoking.

Once in a while they turned to take a look at their captive forward.

"A NAVAL CADET'S TORPEDO BOAT COMMAND"—SEE TRUE BLUE.



But as Hal always lay quite still, they soon ceased to look at all.

Bunched in the stern, they smoked in silence. Pedro seemed to be steering by the stars, while his two fellow rascals sat facing him.

"Do I dare make the effort?" wondered Maynard.

He answered his own question by sitting up. With quick, nervous movements he freed his feet then lay down again.

No sound or sign from the stern of the boat showed that his actions were even suspected.

In the brief moment that Hal had sat up he caught sight of a short, thick stick of wood that lay upon the deck within four feet of him.

Now he contrived to move toward that club a few inches at a time.

It was five minutes before he was near enough to grasp it with his hands.

"So far so good!" gritted the boy, as he lay with the club under him.

"I am thirsty," muttered Pedro.

"Since I am the only one of us who can sail a boat I must not leave the rudder. Go forward and see if there is so much as a drink of water in the butt."

One of the trio rose to obey.

"Now—discovery!" flashed Hal.

Nearer—the Spaniard was within three feet of the boy.

Like a panther, Hal sprang to his feet. Swift as lightning, the club descended upon the Spaniard's head.

Flop! He was down, and a log could not have been more motionless than this stunned man.

"Diablo!" roared Pedro. "The gringo is——"

Right there Valquez's lieutenant stopped, for his remaining follower had wheeled about—had made a violent rush at Hal.

"Drop that club, gringo," bellowed the fellow.

"Right!" gritted Hal, making a spring.

He "dropped" the club exactly where it would do the most good—on the Spaniard's head.

But the other had dodged. It was a glancing blow that did not stun.

"Throw the Yankee pig into the water!" screamed Pedro, rising, with one

hand still on the tiller to watch the combat.

Dropping the club, Hal seized his antagonist by hip and shoulder.

Together they rushed to the rail swayed there an instant, and then one of the pair went overboard.

It was the Spaniard.

Something gleamed in Hal Maynard's hand as he sprang back to avoid lurching overboard.

He had got hold of his pistol again, had snatched it from the Spaniard's belt as he sent that rascal into the water.

As Hal sprang back his foot struck something wet and slippery. Flop! Down on the deck he sprawled, landing with jarring force.

As he fell, the pistol went from his hand. Quick as a flash, Hal groped for it, got it.

While he was doing this a scream of agony came from the water, followed by a shout of:

"El tiburon!" (shark.)

Then came the yell of a man who is enduring torment. Hardly did the sound begin, when it ended, with a gulp like that of a man going under.

But Hal, horrified though he was, did not stop to learn what had happened.

Pistol in hand, he leaped to his feet.

But Pedro, calm, mocking, malignant, stood before him with leveled weapon.

The muzzle of the Spaniard's pistol was within two feet of Hal Maynard's forehead.

"Senor, I have what you Yankee pigs call the drop!"

## CHAPTER X.

### UNDER THE SEARCHLIGHT.

"You've got it," admitted Hal, coolly.

"What are you going to do, senor?"

"It looks as if I were going to die."

Pedro's black eyes snapped with delight.

"Senor, at the first attempt on your part to raise your hand I shall fire. Will you be good enough, on the other hand, to drop your weapon to the deck?"

"Certainly."

But in complying, Hal dropped to the deck with his pistol.



Crouching low, he raised his revolver and fired before Pedro had divined the nature of the trick.

"Diablo! Oh, you Yankee ingrate!" roared Pedro, for the wrist of his right hand was shattered.

His pistol fell to the deck. Hal grappled with him, expecting a quick, easy struggle with this wounded man.

But Pedro, in his fury, sank his teeth in Hal's left arm.

Whack! Hardly had those sharp incisors pierced the flesh when Maynard's revolver butt struck the fellow unconscious.

Springing to the tiller, Hal jammed it bound, headed the boat back toward Lava, lashed the tiller, and next set to work to bind his two unconscious enemies. This quickly accomplished, he flew back to the tiller.

"I'll keep my eyes on those two chaps; they won't serve me as I served them," he muttered, thrusting Pedro's revolver to his vest.

But neither showed any present signs of reviving.

On the water floated a patch of darker-colored liquid. It passed by within three feet of Hal as he sat at the tiller.

"What is it?" he asked himself, then suddenly shuddered, for he knew it to be the lifeblood of the unfortunate who had fallen overboard only to be pounced upon by a following shark.

"Chances of war," sighed Maynard, grimly, as he turned from the sight to watch his course ahead. "If it hadn't been he, I would have met Mr. Shark."

Favored by the wind, he was not long in gaining the head of the inlet.

Before our hero could run ashore, however, three heads bobbed over the water to intercept him.

"Hal, mi amigo," hailed Juan's voice. "Come aboard," sang Maynard, blithely. "All O. K."

Juan clambered over the rail, with the entalbas some fathoms to the rear.

"Not a bad plan to hurry," urged our hero. "There's at least one shark about."

"I have killed two this spring while swimming," replied Paulo, with a smile at showed his white teeth, as he drew

himself dripping into the boat. "Now, what has happened?"

As he spoke, Paulo took the tiller, heading the boat north at once.

It did not take our hero long to recount what had happened in twenty minutes.

While our hero was explaining Jose bound both prisoners more securely, also bandaging Pedro's badly damaged wrist.

From the same rascal's coat our hero's papers were recovered and restored.

"It is too bad that war has not been declared between Spain and the United States," growled Jose. "Then these two rascals would be prisoners of war. As it is, I fear that we shall have to turn them loose at Key West."

"At all events," decided Juan Ramirez, seating himself close to the two fellows and holding the club with which Hal had done such good work, "they shall not have any chance to work themselves free and cause trouble."

Through the night hours, as the little craft moved slowly over the still waters not many words were exchanged.

They were far from safe. Cuba's coast was long in fading from sight on the southern horizon.

"What time is it?" asked Ramirez, after a long interval of silence.

As Hal drew out his watch Jose held close to its dial the lighted end of the cigarette he was smoking.

"A little after two A. M."

"That is strange," murmured Juan. "There is a light to the eastward that looks like the dawn along the horizon."

Hal and Jose moved forward, where their view was unobstructed by the sail.

"That isn't daylight coming," protested Hal, incredulously.

"Then what is it?" propounded Juan.

"I don't know. See, it is moving."

Moving indeed. For a few moments the light disappeared utterly, then came back.

"It's mysterious," mused Juan.

"I beign to think I understand it," rejoined Hal.

"What do you think it to be?"

"The searchlight of a distant warship."

"That is what it is," confirmed Jose.

"I have seen it often."

"It is shining in this direction now,"

**"REMEMBER THE MAINE!"—READ TRUE BLUE, THE NEW NAVAL WEEKLY.**



discovered Hal. "Isn't that light coming nearer, fellows?"

"I think so," said Jose, quietly. "Five minutes should tell the story."

Drawing a coin from his pocket, Juan turned it over rapidly several times before he deposited it in the palm of his left hand.

"What's the game?" inquired Hal.

"Heads," announced Juan, "it's an American warship. Tails, it's a Spanish craft."

"Put your coin away," broke in Jose, quietly. "It is a Spanish gunboat."

"How do you know that?"

"There is no American war vessel so close to the Cuban coast, unless the Key West squadron has already sailed."

"And who shall tell us?" assailed Juan, "that the American squadron has not already sailed for Cuba?"

"It is hardly likely, my young friend. If it were to do so, the Havana Junta would have sent us sooner to Key West."

"Look at the light, now," broke in Hal. "Surely it seems nearer."

"It is nearer," confirmed Jose, after a scrutiny.

"And heading our way?"

"That craft," pronounced the pilot, "is doing worse than coming our way. At present she is headed in a direction that will cut in upon our course a mile or two ahead."

"And we?"

"Well, the gunboat will attend to our case."

"Can we not sail on a new course that will give us a show to get out of range of her searchlight?"

"No, for gunboats get over the water faster, and searchlights look further, than you seem to imagine. No matter what we do, we are likely soon to find ourselves in the rays of that light!"

"Therefore——?"

"We will keep to our original course. It would do us no good to alter it."

"And if we are overhauled——?"

This question made Jose's eyes flash.

"If we are overhauled there is but one thing to do—to keep quiet until a small boat is sent alongside. Then we must open fire upon her crew with the revolvers we have."

"We haven't a show of winning such fight of course?" propounded Hal.

"Naturally not; but if we reserve our fire until we can make it effective there will be a few less Spaniards for the United States to fight. Besides, it will have the result of provoking the other Spaniards in the boat into returning the fire. Is there any one aboard here who would not rather die than go into a Spanish prison with its horrors of filth, torture, starvation and fever?"

"My vote," muttered Hal, "is, like yours, for death."

There was no dissenting voice.

Every minute brought the light nearer.

"It is a question of a very little while," muttered Hal, "when we shall find the edge of that light striking us."

"Are you nervous, senor?" queried Jose, in the same calm voice.

"A trifle," admitted Hal.

"Afraid?"

"If I have not given the answer to the question when in the long grass of Cuba Senor Cantalba, it would be of very little use for me to speak now."

Jose gave the American's hand a warm grasp.

"Those of your nation, senor, who have given their service in Cuba's unpaid armies will never have their courage challenged."

Cool as all were, it was nevertheless extremely trying to sit there in their slowly moving craft watching that light come nearer and nearer.

That intensely bright gleam stole over the water, coming nearer with every throop of the stranger's engines.

"It will touch us in a minute," thrilled Hal.

"In ten seconds," corrected Jose.

He was right. Across the sloop's sail rested the first glow. Lower it came until it rested across the deck.

"They will soon see us, for they are hardly three miles off now. In fifteen minutes they will be alongside."

Brighter became the light, until it almost seemed as if the sloop were lighted by incandescent lamps.

So strong was the glow that the waiting, anxious quartette no longer cared to face it. It hurt their eyes.

"Clif Faraday Under Fire." Read True Blue.



They see us from the gunboat," an-  
 nced Jose. "Do you notice that now  
 light rests steadily upon us?"  
 om! A gun sounded over the waters.  
 The signal for us to lay to," escaped

ay, they're dandy gunners!" cried  
 derisively. "That shot struck so far  
 of us that we couldn't even see  
 e it did strike."

om! A second shot was fired, though  
 e aboard the sloop saw where the  
 ctile hit the water.

We can give them a few minutes'  
 ," smiled Jose. "Do you notice,  
 s, that the breeze is freshening?"

at was, indeed, the case. Now the  
 shot ahead as if endowed with new

om! What in the world were the  
 ish gunners aiming at?

f we could make knot for knot with  
 s," derided Paulo, "they would not  
 s in all the way to Key West."

r some time the sloop continued to  
 along. Shots were fired at intervals  
 the war craft, but only one projec-  
 ame near enough for the sloop's crew  
 the splash.

here," cried Juan, pointing to the  
 "is daylight coming in earnest."

t is daylight," confirmed Jose. "If  
 e Spaniards can get nearer, between  
 light and less distance they should  
 be to hit us."

fore the stronger breeze the sloop  
 now showing her splendid sailing  
 ties. Still, she could not hope to  
 rip a steam vessel.

There is something else traveling  
 e waters," cried Hal, springing up  
 pointing to the northward.

omething else, indeed—a gray-hulled  
 boat which, traveling without lights,  
 been bearing down upon them  
 igh the night, and now stood red-  
 in the dawn.

Have you a glass?" palpitated Hal.

silence Jose handed him a pair of  
 ne glasses. Through them our hero  
 tly scanned the gray-hulled new-  
 er.

Old Glory, and nothing else!" choked  
 boy, studying the newcomer's distant

As he turned, Jose smiled and pointed  
 toward the black-hulled Spanish craft.  
 Her most prominent part now was her  
 stern.

"She declines the fight," chuckled  
 Paulo. "What a pity the Cuban coast is  
 so near that she will escape."

And escape the Spanish boat did.

Within fifteen minutes our travelers  
 were alongside Uncle Sam's trim little  
 gunboat, the Nashville.

Greetings and messages were ex-  
 changed. The Nashville was out patrol-  
 ing the waters, in order to give timely  
 notice to her sister warships at Key West  
 of the approach of Spanish vessels.

Yet the only Spanish vessel sighted by  
 the Nashville had turned her back and  
 fled.

Before noon that day Hal and his com-  
 panions sailed into the harbor at Key  
 West.

Their mission and journey were alike  
 over.

The Key West squadron was provided  
 with its Cuban pilots. Hal and Juan  
 mailed the important letters intrusted to  
 them.

Pedro and his evil comrade were after  
 a while set free. It is believed that they  
 found some means to return to Cuba.

But Hal and Juan drew a breath of  
 relief.

Their mission had succeeded. They  
 had struck a blow that told for Cuba.

[THE END.]

There was grand work waiting to be  
 done by Hal Maynard and his Cuban  
 chum, Juan Ramirez. The firing of the  
 first distinctively American gun in that  
 hothouse of heroism, Cuba, was a great  
 feat reserved by destiny for a splendid,  
 representative specimen of young Ameri-  
 can manhood. The landing of the first  
 United States troops in Cuba in thrilling-  
 ly and patriotically described in a splen-  
 did story, founded on events that are now  
 history. That story, entitled, "The First  
 Gun; or, Lieutenant Hal Maynard's  
 Secret Mission in Cuba," will be found  
 complete in No. 3 of the Starry Flag,  
 out next week!

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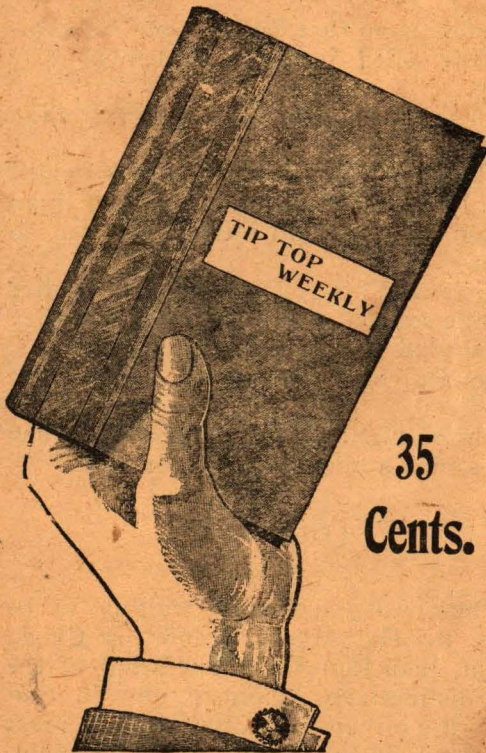
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